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AUTHOR Cardwell, G. R.
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ABSTRACT

Past recidivism studies on adventure/wilderness programs for delinquent youth have suffered from several problems: lack of uniform definition and interpretation of recidivism; varying lengths of study time; different follow-up periods; provincial or state variance in returns to Training School or incarceration in an adult system and in the process for returns; failure to differentiate between type and severity of criminal offenses; and assumption of recidivism based on charge with an offense rather than judicial findings. Six recidivism studies, five on Project DARE, bear out these shortcomings. It behooves wilderness programs dealing with delinquent youth to establish criteria under which they wish to be evaluated. Two alternative evaluation criteria are economic (per diem program costs compared with costs in an institution) and the fitness factor (possible correlation between increase in physical fitness during program with increase in self-esteem). The key issue, however, in establishing alternative evaluation measures lies with demonstration of personal growth and social and physical functioning in a program that is replicable. Effective programming requires specification of (1) target behaviors/needs, (2) processes to achieve acquisition of new skills/attitudes, (3) logical reasons why processes should work, (4) desired outcome and expected duration of effect, and (5) expected level of success. (RS)

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RESEARCH AND THE FALLACY OF RECIDIVISM

STUDIES ON WILDERNESS PROGRAMS FOR TROUBLED YOUTH

BY

G.R. Cardwell

Superintendent, Project D.A.R.E.

Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services

Children's Services Division

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INTRODUCTION

Upon reflecting on the present plight of adventure/wilderness programs in Corrections, I cannot help but conjure images of the meeting of the Cheshire Cat and Alice in Alice in Wonderland. Alice comes to the crossroads and asks "Which way should I go from here?"; the cat replies "That depends on where you want to get to"; Alice says "I don't much care so long as I get somewhere "; the Cheshire Cat answers "Well then, it does not matter which way you go".

Adventure/wilderness programs at the present time may not know where they are going and, in effect, have gone down many paths and in many directions during the past few years. Needless to say, this lack of direction and purpose has been an ideal situation for researchers with their "hard-core" analysis and statistics. I am certain that there is nothing that a researcher prefers more than to have a program exemplifying the confused state or an Alice in Wonderland.

A number of gurus of experiential education believe that we must not cater to researchers and statistical analysts. The contemporary philosophy tends to be "if you know the answer, you missed the experience" or "if you have to ask thequestion, you will never understand the answer". This rhetoric may be philosophically stimulating and may give the experiential educators comfort under any attack from analytical research; however, in the end it only tends to isolate and develop a more insular gulf between the reality of professional research and the experiential education movement in general.

It is necessary that we transcend our rhetoric and establish the framework for our "movement" whether it be in the field of higher education or in work related to adventure programs with delinquent youth. Only after we establish the components that we wish researchers to evaluate will we be able to overcome the problems of research studies of the past.

"A trip down memory lane"

The classic study of recidivism was conducted by Francis Kelly and Daniel Baer and their findings were published in "Physical Challenge as a Treatment for Delinquency" in Crime and Delinquency, October 1971. The testing measure chosen for this study was the Osgood Semantic Differential which was used as a test before and after the experience to measure self-concept. The matching characteristics of this study follow:

1. Age;
2. Physical health;
3. Mental health;
4. Intelligence;
5. Absence of history of violent, assaultive or sexual offences;
6. Voluntary participation.

The effectiveness of this program was measured solely by a recidivism study. Recidivism was defined as a return to a juvenile institution or commitment to an adult institution for a new offence within one year after parole. The results of this study indicated that the group who experienced the Outward Bound program had a 20% recidivism rate while the control group had a 42% recidivism rate. Kelly and Baer concluded that this was an unqualified success for adventure/wilderness programs.

The researchers were able to identify a number of important and non-important variables. The important variables were:

1. Age of first court appearance;
2. Presence of both parents in the home;
3. The first institutionalization;
4. Type of offence.

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The non-important variables were:

1. I.Q.;
2. Race;
3. Urban-rural residence;
4. Religion;
5. Selection from a Training School or a Reception Centre.

If I could summarize Kelly and Baer's study, there appear to be five important conclusions:

1. Delinquents who had never been to a Training School were more likely to succeed than those who had been at Training School.
2. The program was not successful for delinquents who were labelled as "stubborn".
3. The program was more successful for delinquents who stole material goods or cars. Therefore, delinquents who were responding to an "adolescent crisis" rather than to a character defect appeared to profit most from this type of program.
4. The program "provides an opportunity to employ physical challenge as a masculine protest and as a device to assert independence".
5. Programs with consistent physical activity and endurance, but no high excitement or real danger are not successful in reducing recidivism.

The above summary has not withstood the test of time. Although number 1, 2 and 3 remain truisms, number 4 has overtures of sexism and although accepted in the early 70's is a malaprop of the late 70's. As well, number 5 has always been questioned as the only variable in this conclusion of Kelly and Baer involved the element of risk and excitement; no concern was expressed

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regarding type of staff, location or budgetary problems regarding the various Outward Bound schools. However, the most pessimistic view of this study was expressed by Francis Kelly himself at the Second Annual Experiential Education Conference at Estes Park, Colorado in October of 1974, when he stated that "While the difference in recidivism rates continue to favour the Outward Bound group, it is no longer statistically significant".

Project D.A.R.E. - Recidivism Studies

Basically, there have been five recidivism studies conducted on Project D.A.R.E. since its opening in 1971. They are as follows:

1. A. Birkenmayer and M. Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of D.A.R.E. Graduates (1971-72) (Toronto, 1973).
2. Birkenmayer and Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of Male Training School Recidivists: I The Follow-up Interview, (Toronto 1975).
3. A.Birkenmayer and M. Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of Male Training School Recidivists: II The D.A.R.E. Experience (Toronto 1976).
4. Marion Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of Male Training School Recidivists III The Total Experience (a description) (Toronto 1976).
5. Sally Rogers, "Community Adjustment of D.A.R.E. Wendigo Graduates", (Toronto 1976).

I would like to briefly summarize and identify some of the concerns regarding the recidivism studies conducted on Project D.A.R.E. I believe there are a number of anomalies in these studies and that, in effect, it was perhaps premature or erroneous to have such studies conducted on its program.

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The first study conducted by Birkenmayer and Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of D.A.R.E. Graduates (1971-72), was not overly positive regarding the community results of D.A.R.E. graduates. However, based on the same criteria as the Kelly and Baer study in 1971, "Physical Challenge as a Treatment for Delinquency", the same recidivism rate was discovered. Kelly and Baer had a 20% recidivism rate while Birkenmayer and Polonoski discovered a 20.5% recidivism rate. The definition of recidivism was the same for both studies i.e. a return to a juvenile institution or commitment to an adult institution for a new offence within one year after parole or graduation. The sample population for Kelly and Baer was N=60 and for Birkenmayer and Polonoski was N=78; and the time factor for the study was the same i.e. one year. Birkenmayer and Polonoski concluded that the D.A.R.E. graduates were "not as successful as had been expected". The level of success which was expected was never pre-determined by the Ministry, the camp or Research Branch. However, in light of the basic recidivism rate with Kelly and Baer there appears to be a basic anomaly in the researchers differences of opinion regarding "success".

The second study by Birkenmayer and Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of Male Training School Recidivists: I The Follow-up Interview, stated that the D.A.R.E. program graduates and regular Training School graduates showed little difference three months after graduation in the areas of work or school experience as well as delinquent activity. However, 37 out of 42 D.A.R.E. graduates (88%) had positive feelings regarding their D.A.R.E. experience while only 22% of the control group had positive feelings about their Training School experience.

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Conclusion A from the "positive feelings" component is to take a cynical approach to this statistic in that D.A.R.E. graduates may still be as prone to commit delinquent acts, however, they "feel good" about themselves and their past experience. Therefore, you have a delinquent youth who feels good about himself while commiting delinquent activities. Conclusion B may be somewhat more optimistic. It assumes that alienated youth may seldom, if ever, be involved in a positive experience of any duration. A wilderness/adventure program is a positive experience; whereas regular Training School is often a negative experience. The measurement of this positive experience may take years to identify and defy standard evaluation.

The third recidivism study by Birkenmayer and Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of Male Training School Recidivists: II The D.A.R.E. Experience, concluded that "many of the boys who went to D.A.R.E. did not have the characteristics to profit from the D.A.R.E. experience". This brings up two major factors:

1. Selection Criteria; and
2. Selection Process and Intake.

1. The Selection Criteria for D.A.R.E. was to accept only the multiple recidivist and very few, if any, students were first offenders or "soft-core delinquents". A conclusion arising from this indicates that wilderness/adventure programs like D.A.R.E. may not be ideally suited for the multiple recidivist. It is necessary for social agencies to realize that a wilderness/adventure program should not always be viewed at the "backend" of the spectrum of service for children but should be definitely seen as a possible resource for early intervention into youthful delinquent patterns.

2. The Selection Process and Intake during the time of this study was in a turmoil. The number of candidates for D.A.R.E. was extremely low as training school counts were dropping and students referred to D.A.R.E. were usually serious discipline problems at the referring school. Although matching characteristics with the sample population group may be similar, the multiple returnee who was referred to D.A.R.E. was in most cases a serious behavioural problem within the Training School from which he was referred. This would seem to indicate that D.A.R.E. was receiving the most serious internal institutional behavioural students within the Training School population.

The fourth study was conducted by Marion Polonoski, The Community Adjustment of Male Training School Recidivists III The Total Experience (A description), and her study criticised all Training Schools for the following:

1. No alteration of behaviour;
2. Not satisfying the educational needs of the child;
3. No deterence regarding the child's criminal activity.

As well, the study pronounced that Aftercare Services in Ontario were not meeting the needs of Training School graduates. This raised a major concern for Project D.A.R.E. D.A.R.E. tended to be viewed as an isolated experience and one of the major complaints involved the child's "ski jump syndrome" behaviour upon his return to the community. If the wilderness/adventure experience is identified as a continuum of experience rather than an isolated activity, then parole or aftercare services must adapt to the unique needs of students graduating from this type of program to the community. The past system has not been suited to D.A.R.E. graduates, and unless major changes occur, wilderness/adventure students transferring to the community now, and in the future, are doomed to the same level of success

or failure as in the past. The program components of a wilderness/adventure school can improve 100% or 1000%; however, the key to the future for the child lies with the adoption of his changed attitudinal values to the community. Therefore, it is the writer's contention that recidivism studies on a wilderness program are meaningless unless those wilderness programs have a definite follow-up plan and the follow-up plan involves personnel who have been trained in the process of the wilderness/adventure experience.

The fifth and final recidivism study was conducted by Sally Rogers, "Community Adjustment of D.A.R.E. Wendigo Graduates". This study is most upsetting as it identified a recidivism rate of 35% for D.A.R.E. graduates. However, this figure is totally unreliable as the researcher defined recidivism to mean not only returns to Training School or commitment to an adult institution, but also placement in a Ministry Group Home from placement. Also included in this 35% was termination of wardships. No attempt to differentiate between the termination of wardship was made i.e. for positive or negative reasons. An explanatory note must be added on this as in Ontario, students who are placed in a home in the community proceed through a graduation process and are recommended for graduation by the Training School Superintendent and the Training School Advisory Board and then approved by the Minister. However, placements in Ministry Group Homes are transfers and a graduation process is not required. Therefore, if a child is placed in a Ministry Group Home from a placement in the community after graduation, this involves a theoretical return to Training School and a transfer to the Group Home. The researcher, while working on computer print-outs, noticed these theoretical returns to Training School and included them in her recidivism studies. This alone makes the statistics suspect and destroys the possibility of comparison with other recidivism studies. One may speculate that a true recidivism rate was somewhere between 22% to 25%.

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General Concerns Regarding Recidivism Studies

The following are some of the general concerns regarding recidivism studies:

1. There are numerous definitions and interpretations of recidivism.
2. There are different lengths of time for studies.
3. There are different follow-up periods, usually from three months to three years.
4. Returns to Training School or incarceration in an adult system vary according to the province or state. Also, the process for these returns vary greatly, including administrative review, quasi-judicial process, true judicial process. Also, every state has different regulations regarding students who may be placed in training school i.e. status offenders, truants, promiscuous girls, children in need of protection. Therefore, comparative studies of wilderness programs based on recidivism may be somewhat unreliable.
5. Many recidivism studies do not differentiate between the type and severity of criminal offences. Certainly this is a major weakness of reliable statistics. Only in the past few years have such crime and recidivism indices such as the Uniform Crime Reports, the Sellin-Wolfgang Index of Delinquency and the Recidivism Outcome Index been implemented. Certainly this shortcoming is a major weakness of past studies.
6. Many recidivism studies assume recidivism if a student is charged with an offence. The criterion is the laying of a charge by the police rather than the judicial findings of the case. As well, the student does not have to be found guilty by the courts to become a statistic of recidivism. Surely this must be viewed as a major fallacy in recidivism studies in general.

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Alternatives to Recidivism Studies

All wilderness programs dealing with delinquent youth must begin to establish the criteria under which they wish to be evaluated. Some wilderness programs have already dismissed recidivism studies in favour of the realities of economics. Certainly, wilderness/adventure programs are able to demonstrate that per diems are demonstrably lower than within institutions. Failing the success of the per diem argument, then it is certainly true that program costs in a short, intense, wilderness program, will be noticeably lower than the program costs within a four to seven month incarceration within an institution.

Some programs have already implemented fitness testing and are completing fitness tests on students prior to their involvement in a wilderness program as well as at the conclusion of a wilderness program. This is perhaps the most objective measure which can be tested for our students. One interesting development of the fitness factor involves the possible co-relation between students who demonstrate the greatest increase in physical fitness with students demonstrating the greatest increase in self-esteem and self-concept. Very little research has been completed in this area; however, it is without doubt a facet which requires a great deal of analysis by our discipline.

However, it is my contention that the key issue involved in establishing alternative measures for evaluation remains with the replication of program. Until we are able to demonstrate to clinicians that our program is, in effect, replicable, we will be unable to establish our program as legitimate. The following are some suggestions for this process. Without doubt, the following must be viewed as pre-conditions for effectiveness of evaluation:

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1. That the program be clearly articulated.
2. That the goals and/or expected effects be clearly specified.
3. That the causal assumptions linking program to the goals and/or effects be plausible.

Stated somewhat differently, it is believed that the following must be implemented in order to achieve effective programming in wilderness activities for troubled youth.

1. Specification of the target behaviours and needs which will be the focus of the program.
2. Specifications of the processes that will impinge on a youth to achieve acquisition of new skills and attitudes.
3. Specification of the theoretical or logical reason why these processes should work.
4. Specificiation of the desired outcome of the youth as well as the expected duration of the effect of this intervention.
5. Specification of the expected level of success.

Without doubt, this is the major task before us at the present time. We must demonstrate that the program increases both competence and maturity as well as enhancing the ability to relate with others as well as improving physical fitness. The child will undergo personal growth, social functioning and physical functioning but the processes that implement this must be replicable. In closing, I would like to paraphrase Francis Kelly, who stated that adventure programs are an effective, humane and economical treatment modality for adolescent delinquents. However, like electricity, we know it works but we are not sure why.